Assistance from USO Fund to improve teledensity in rural areas

100. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that according to an estimate from TRAI, to cover 70-80 per cent of rural population, about 15,000 base stations are required by each operator;

(b) if so, whether TRAI has recommended for giving assistance from the Universal Service Obligation Fund, which helps in reaching remote villages where telephone has become a distant dream and also achieving the Teledensity Target of 4 per cent by the year 2010;

(c) whether it is possible that the operators can be convinced to share passive infrastructure;

(d) if so, whether any effort has been made in this direction by his Ministry; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) As per recommendations of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on "Growth of Telecom Services in Rural India", about 20,000 base stations will be required to cover around 80 to 90% of the rural population.

(b) to (d) Yes, Sir.

(e) Wide ranging consultations have been held with Access Service Providers, Infrastructure Providers, Association of Telecom Service Providers and Manufacturers to work out modalities for sharing of certain elements of infrastructure and to provide support from Universal Service Obligation Fund for the same. Elements of infrastructure which can be shared include land, tower, shelter etc.

FDI norms for telecom sector

101. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that FDI norms for telecom industry are being reviewed;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) how proposed changes are expected to benefit industry, consumers and Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) There is no proposal for review of FDI norms for Telecom Industry at the stage.

(b) and (c) Do not arise in view of (a) above.

Availability of low cost computers

102. SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether any efforts have been taken to bring down the prices of computers; and

(b) if so, whether steps would be taken to make computers available at every nook and corner of the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Yes, Sir. The Government is facilitating the industry to make available Personal Computers (PCs) at affordable prices for the masses. Three companies have already launched PCs costing less than Rs. 10,000/- in the market.

(b) Yes, Sir. The Report of the Expert Committee on "PC Penetration, Internet and Domestic Software" set up by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Department of Information Technology has delineated a vision for India which envisages increase in PC penetration by 2008 to the levels of 65 PCs per 1000 persons from the existing 14 PCs per 1000 persons.

Demand for additional spectrum by telecom operators

103. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that telecom operators have been demanding additional spectrum to run the service efficiently and to add more subscribers;